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ABSTRACT

This case study of a university-school collaborative project examines the roles that seventh grade language arts students can play in classroom curricular decision making, the degree to which a teacher can negotiate with students about content, and how both students and teacher are able to balance the dynamics of control and responsibility for learning within an integrative language arts curriculum. A thematic unit was developed based on student concerns about death of the individual and of the Earth. The instructional outline included a time of reflective thinking and focusing, a time for discussion, and a time for group and individual learning. The teacher's role became one of facilitator, through questioning and asking for clarification of student projects, and negotiator, through identifying the parameters of study and allowing students to make choices and assume responsibilities for their learning. The paper concludes that the students eagerly accepted the invitation of negotiated decision making with their teacher and took their role as partner in learning seriously. An integrative curriculum was found to be a feasible way to approach sharing control in the language arts curriculum. The students actively engaged in content, language activities, social learning, and academic interaction while exercising their values and voices in decision making. Students' personal and social concerns intertwined, motivating students to learn. (Contains 11 references.) (JDD)

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Negotiation: Student-Teacher Collaborative Decision Making In An Integrative Curriculum

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Negotiation: Student - Teacher Collaborative Decision Making In An Integrative Curriculum

Introduction

The objective of this case study was to examine the role(s) the seventh grade language arts students can play in classroom learning decision making, the degree to which a middle grades teacher can negotiate with students about content, and how both students and teacher are able to balance the dynamics of control and responsibility for learning within an integrative language arts curriculum.

When the issues of control and authority are discussed at the middle school level, it is usually administrators and teachers making decisions about what is to be taught, how it is taught, and when it is taught. Rarely are students part of this decision-making process. Yet, the middle school concept advocates the accommodation of adolescent learners (George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992). If we as teachers and administrators are truly to understand and to work with adolescents, perhaps we should begin listening to the adolescent voice.

Students can play a part in the power structure within the middle school community. One way students can become active participants within the academic community is to allow them a voice in curricular decision-making. Adolescents are at a developmental stage where they desire and need to feel that what they say is heard. They desire to have some degree of ownership of the educational process and product where they can be active participants (Atwell, 1987). They want to be included in the decisions that are being made and they want the teacher to work collaboratively with them in learning about what matters to them.

As university and seventh grade teacher collaborators, we examined the concept of an integrative approach to middle school education and studied the feasibility and consequences of such an approach. An integrative curriculum supersedes the traditional, separated content area curriculum by primarily focusing on the intersection between adolescents' personal concerns and the social

concerns of the world at large. This intersection becomes a theme to be studied while developing such "living" skills as reflective thinking, problem-solving, valuing, and self-concepting (Beane, 1990). Students actively participate by identifying their personal and social concerns while also deciding how these concerns can best be addressed. It is through this constructionist environment, that students will discover and construct meaning from prior experiences. They process information by analyzing data to detect patterns, forming and testing hypotheses, and integrating the new knowledge within their prior experience (Elkind, 1979; Piaget, 1969; Siegel, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978). With all of this in mind, we initiated an integrative study in Holly's seventh grade language arts class where the students were presented with the opportunity and challenge of designing their own course of study.

Thursday, 5th period

"The bell has rung," Holly's voice rings out perhaps louder than she would prefer. But this is 5th period, right after lunch, and what she calls "my most gregarious group" is just beginning to settle in. This is the first day of a thematic integrative study within the language arts classroom.

For the last six weeks, we had worked through identifying and organizing our goals for this integrative unit as well as Holly's uncertainty of the whole endeavor. Giving up control, even a little, to share it with the students was an issue we had to talk out. Originally we weren't exactly sure where this experience was going to lead, so we established some general guidelines for the "teacher's" role as guide and an instructional outline for students. This outline included student groupings, daily time management, learning outcomes and obligations. Since we were already committed to literature-based instruction, the primary instructional materials would be adolescent literature that would address the intersection of the personal and social concerns of these students.

To discover the students' personal and social concerns, Holly surveyed her class a month before the thematic unit was to start. Together, we tallied the results of such questions as:

What are you most concerned about personally?

What is your greatest concern for the world?

If you could change anything about yourself, what would it be?

What is your greatest fear?

What would you study if given the opportunity?

Students' responses to the personal concerns question ranged from "failing school" to "dying of A.I.D.S." to "going to hell" with the majority of responses revolving around their own death. The question of social concerns brought responses ranging from "the world blowing up" and "nuclear war," to "pollution" and "the environment." While at first we were surprised by the gravity of the students' answers, Holly remembered the students had just finished a Family Life Unit in health where A.I.D.S. was discussed and the students were still dealing with it at the time of the survey.

Building on Beane's (1990) integrative curriculum model, we found in the students' personal and social concerns an overlapping of death, that of the individual and of the planet; micro/macro versions of each other. We recognized that this student interest could drive the curriculum and could easily become the theme of study. Once the theme was determined from the students' responses, the rest of our instructional outline needed defining. We wanted a time of reflective thinking and focusing, a time for discussion, and a time for group and individual learning. We eventually agreed that daily reflection and discussion were essential and that group time and individual time would be determined by the students', teacher, and their needs. With this tentative agenda, the teacher's role had to become one of facilitator and negotiator, who would watch over the flow and direction of the unit. This

"watching over," did not mean she would control the class, but rather negotiate with groups and individuals about their work. She would facilitate by questioning and asking for clarification throughout the activities the students developed and processed for this unit. And she would negotiate by identifying the parameters of study and then allowing the students to make choices and assume responsibilities for their learning within that structure (Freedman, 1992). We believed that this negotiated context would facilitate both the small group and individual students' studies while contributing to the social context established for the whole group's learning.

The learning strategies we outlined were structured to tie together. We decided to start every class period with reflection through journal writing. Sometimes the Holly would give the prompts for writing, other days the students would. We felt this was a good way to focus the class, develop reflective thinking skills, and tie in the prior day's learning activities.

Following journal writing, part of the daily structure would revolve around whole class discussion. These topical discussions would stem from the students' journal entries and would respond to the students' willingness and interest in examining and discussing the concerns, questions, and issues germane to the topic. We hoped these discussions would be interactive. With interaction, authentic learning through problem-solving, valuing, and social action, could take place. Students would be at the center of the curriculum where their voices could be heard.

Another area where students' voices might be heard would be in small groups. Since we had decided to use adolescent literature as the primary reading material, we felt small literature groups would provide the best arena for literary discussion. The class included readers on different reading levels and we knew we needed to find literature that would address those varying levels. While group composition would not be determined by reading ability, that issue

still needed to be considered. We realized the literature selections had to address both the students' varying reading levels and their interests. And we wanted literature that would present the topic, death, in a multitude of settings and from various perspectives. This way the students could analyze the topic and construct personal meaning more holistically. From prior experience, we knew an adolescent protagonist with the adolescent voice could encourage a keener identification to the topic and would better hold the adolescent reader's attention.

While we believed the students would develop and process more information in this integrative unit, we knew they had to make the rest of the decisions concerning the path the study would take. This advanced planning had taken us six weeks. We did not know if we had planned too much, too little, or if this whole endeavor would work. But we were committed to this idea and with that in mind, we went off to class to see what would happen.

Thursday, 5th period

And so the bell had rung. Because the period lasts just 48 minutes, Holly and her students knew they had a lot of planning, sorting, and deciding to accomplish this period.

Sitting at the teacher's desk, I began to observe (Spradley, 1980). I had plans to eventually participate, but this first day I wanted to observe the students constructing the topical scaffold that would serve as unit framework. What were they going to study, how were they going to approach it, what materials would they use, and what would be their responsibilities?

After the class settled, Holly explained the results of the survey. She opened up a discussion of their primary personal concern and their predominant social concern. After examining the ideas of individual death and environmental problems, the students took the opportunity to discuss what these two issues meant to them. I noticed Holly did not need to extend much of an invitation to these students. They eagerly wanted to share their ideas and

opinions.

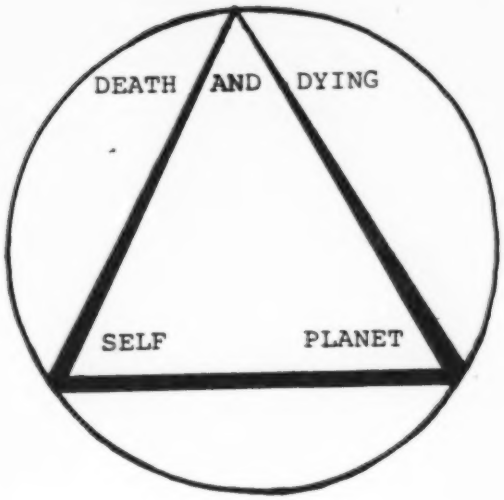
The students began to raise questions revolving around death. They wanted to know about spirits and who believed in ghosts. They wanted to know what happens to us as we die and after we die. Kate wanted to know, "Do you think the light at the end of the tunnel is heaven?" and Joe interjected as he paced the back of the room, "How are we ever gonna know, since no one comes back from the dead?" Other students raised their hands to share, while others started conversations amongst themselves. This was definitely a topic the students wanted to discuss and study.

Gradually the conversation shifted to talking about death of the planet. Each student had something to say about the planet and the "rotten" way human beings were treating it. One thing was obvious: these 7th graders had concerns and questions, and they wanted the opportunity to talk and explore them.

These two issues intertwined, and the students began to see the connection. Using her hands to visually represent the two issues, Holly interlocked her fingers and said, "I can see a clear connection between these two issues we are discussing. The death of the individual and the death of the planet. Do you see a connection?" Heads nodded. Again hands shot up. "It's like we're all connected. If we kill the planet, we just kill ourselves." Yes, the students had made the connection between social and personal concerns.

Holly drew Figure One on the board and labeled the vertices. This figure was a visual representation of the intersection between the students' personal and social concerns.

Figure 1



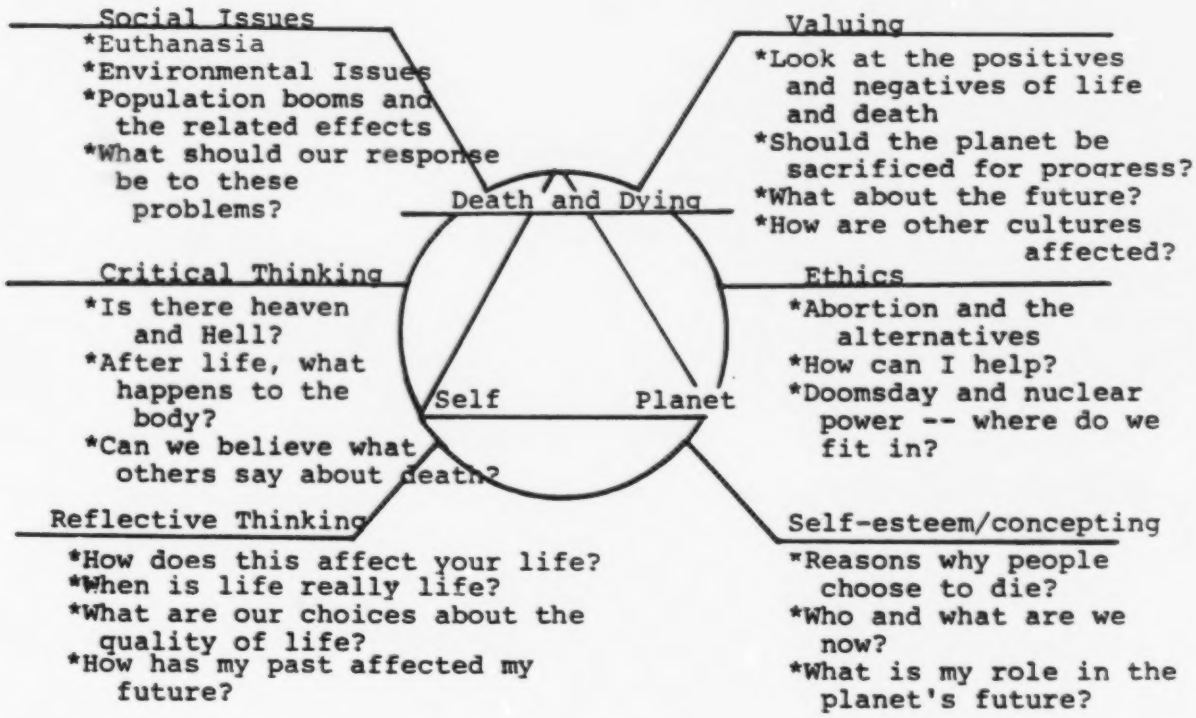
Todd questioned the purpose of the triangle. Holly verbalized her perception of how the triangle works. One vertex represents our personal concern and the other vertex represents the social concern. The apex is the meeting place of both concerns. "The personal concern is seen from a single perspective -- me worrying about my own death. The social concern is a more global perspective -- me worrying about the whole world dying and I'm a part of that whole world." The class talked about this intersection briefly. The ideas of being able to not only destroy the planet and ourselves, but the ability to understand how we can prevent that death in some ways was the thread of conversation.

From this, Holly shifted towards the structure the study could take. "Today, we really need to decide how we are going to study the issues of death and dying." Using the figure on the board, she broadened the theme. She drew six lines that branched from the circle, creating a semantic web. Each branch of the web was labeled to depict one of the living skills we had selected to focus on during this unit.

"I thought we would build a semantic map of ideas and then proceed from there." The class appeared very familiar with

semantic webbing but not familiar with the living skills. "What's ethics mean?" "Do people make their values?", "Why do people do that?" "What's self-esteem?" The classroom teacher, with the help of several students, explained the different terms and gave brief examples. From there, the students' own brainstorming skills took off. They filled out the web with their own examples and ideas of what could be studied.

Figure 2


Social Issues
*Euthanasia
*Environmental Issues
*Population booms and the related effects
*What should our response be to these problems?
Valuing
*Look at the positives and negatives of life and death
*Should the planet be sacrificed for progress?
*What about the future?
*How are other cultures affected?
Death and Dying
Critical Thinking
*Is there heaven and Hell?
*After life, what happens to the body?
*Can we believe what others say about death?
Ethics
*Abortion and the alternatives
*How can I help?
*Doomsday and nuclear power -- where do we fit in?
Self
Planet
Reflective Thinking
*How does this affect your life?
*When is life really life?
*What are our choices about the quality of life?
*How has my past affected my future?
Self-esteem/concepting
*Reasons why people choose to die?
*Who and what are we now?
*What is my role in the planet's future?

Along with giving ideas and examples, many of the students again had personal stories to share with the class. Throughout this exchange, the classroom teacher was simply an encouraging participant. She added ideas from her perspective and questioned others for clarification about theirs. I found this discussion highly stimulating and in many respects intellectual. We often have the idea that adolescents are too self-absorbed to think beyond themselves. But in this classroom I observed students keenly involved with world issues and the rights of others. The period was passing, so Holly used this opportunity to switch gears and focus on the books as closure.

She presented each book through a mini-booktalk. Each talk highlighted the theme of the book, the perspective of the protagonist, the setting, and the literary qualities, which included reading level and vocabulary difficulty. Each student then listed their top three reading choices. They knew this was for determining which literature group they would join and surprisingly, many students made choices based on personal preference, not personal friendships.

This classroom was a place where students and teacher really did work together. They actually talked to each other about emotional topics and personal feelings while making important decision regarding their learning. This was a place where perhaps, as D. J. said, "The beauty of nature and all it contains can be explored and appreciated in a thoughtful manner."

Exploring Death and Dying

After the first day, Lea was scheduled to observe the class once a week on alternate. (Later she became so fascinated and involved with this learning process she came more often.) Within the first week, the students made the decision to work on two separate projects. One would be a group project and the other would be an individual evaluation paper or persuasive piece. They also decided the specific topics to study about death of individuals and death of the planet.

The second day of the study the class brainstormed topics of

interest within the parameters established by the intersection of their concerns. The topics included crime in general, euthanasia, pollution, abortion, the rainforests, endangered animals, A.I.D.S., nuclear war, the ozone, littering, drugs, and hate-crimes. We noticed that since all these issues were current, the students could share the information they had read in the newspaper or listened to on the news the previous night. And because the topics were current, none of the students seemed overly concerned about finding information on a topic.

Once the class had finished brainstorming topics, they broke into their literature groups to decide which topic would be the most "fun" for that particular group to study. The groups, based upon students' literature choices, had been decided after class the day before, and while some students weren't completely satisfied by the results of the grouping, they were willing to work within the group they had been assigned. During this short period of group time, the students were in high motion. Each group wanted to be the first to tell Ms. Johnson what they wanted to study, since they had agreed as a class that each group would study something different. Those groups that were most cohesive made decisions within minutes and the list on the chalkboard quickly became smaller. Fortunately, there were more ideas on the board than groups, so again the groups were satisfied with what they chose to study.

The groups came together and to close out the class, Holly had them write in their journals. She prompted them with a question of expectations. "What did they expect to learn in the next six weeks?" The students responded with a multitude of expectations.

A number of other decisions were made by the students the first week. Within the groups, students had to decide how to approach their learning. Should they read the book first and then begin to answer their questions about the project? Should they start their group project now and leave their individual papers for later? Should they work on everything all at once? Or should they just take things one day at a time and decide what feels right that

day?

All these curricular options were open to the students because Holly, committed and willing to negotiate with student, made it quite clear they would be "calling the shots" for their group. As the groups began working together, they found working with groups a bit challenging. Early in the second week of study the class discussed group responsibility and process. During this time, the same questions groups had asked themselves earlier were discussed with the whole class.

Student concerns and questions were posted on the board. The students were concerned with the choices they were making about what to do and how to do it. Holly opened the discussion with an overview of the decisions the class had made the week before. She listed and the class clarified all the study processes, objectives, and requirements of journals, individual papers, group projects, and literature reading. The students raised additional questions concerning their own group approach and then went to their groups to finalize their plans.

Groups in Process

One of the objectives for this integrative studies project was to closely observe how these groups functioned -- how decisions are made, how students work together, and what kinds of activities, discussions, and problems they encounter along the way. Our way of studying this was to have Lea "join" groups and just observe their interactions. Lea's intention was to observe and eventually participate as a participate observer, yet the students began to enculturate her into their society. This enculturation began to include students visiting Lea before class. They asked such questions as, "Are you self-employed?", "Do you know so and so at the university?", and "What is the weather like outside?" Simple greetings became a part of their entry behavior if Lea was there.

Yet this enculturation was two-fold. Not only was Lea enculturated socially, she was enculturated into the study groups. She started out observing the groups and their interactions, then

became a participant within the group interaction, and finally she became what we term, "participant-facilitator." By this we mean that Lea became an active member who began to participate and influence group decision-making and processing. This was not what we had planned, it was a natural progression based upon Lea's relationship to the groups.

One of Lea's first observations of group interaction was with Group Two. They were reading, A Summer to Die (Lowry, 1977) and had four members, two females and two males. During this early meeting, the members talked among themselves about their individual progress in the book. Emily assumed leadership and suggested, "Let's start reading one chapter a night." The others agreed and then began to discuss the group project. They identified what they wanted to do and how they would proceed. Each member was given a task to complete in order to accomplish their goal with all being responsible for the common task of finding current events. With these larger decisions made, the group lapsed into informal small talk about the book and what they were thinking of doing for an individual paper.

The last week of the study, we saw the results of what these groups could do when given the responsibility for their own learning. This was the week the six groups presented their group projects to the class. We had been observing their progress in this group endeavor from the beginning. We watched as they struggled through the group dynamics and role responsibilities. We watched as they planned and then acquired the resources for their presentation. We watched as they manipulated the information and assimilated the topical knowledge. And we watched as they demonstrated their learning through presentations.

These presentations included a diversity of designs. One group designed and constructed information pamphlets on the ozone and the dangers of its destruction. Another group wrote a skit and dramatically presented the evil of hate crimes and its impact on America. The third group fashioned persuasive posters on saving the rainforests. Still another group gave a seminar on AIDS and

its prevention and the fifth group showed a panorama of the different types of pollution plaguing our environment. Group Six, having split apart in the fourth week, could not present as a group.

Although though Group Six could not function effectively as a group, that did not detract from the rest of the groups' accomplishments. As a whole, the students did a remarkable job working together and fulfilling the tasks they set. They were able to design curriculum tasks and learn from their decision-making and involvement in activities. They learned both process and product, information and assimilation, and rights and responsibilities. They learned to exercise their voice and we learned it resonated with reason and clarity of purpose.

Class Discussions and Journal Writing

Another focus our study was large group discussions. This time provided students with the opportunity to critically think and reflect upon their ideas and values concerning the issues they were discussing. It was also a time to question and decide their role in the issues and in the world at large. And it gave us an opportunity to work with these young people and give them a powerful voice in examining the issues (Beane, 1991). This forum did not generate from the language arts curriculum or Holly's interest in the subject, but from the students' questions and concerns. This allowed the students to use their knowledge and their skills to search for their own answers. By allowing them to use their voices, the students responded enthusiastically to these discussions. The result was an authentic interweaving of cognitive and affective learning that answered adolescent needs, not teacher or adult agendas.

Daily, the class would talk together after journal writing. The discussions were prompted by the journal writings, which in turn, were prompted by the students themselves or Holly, as part of her facilitating role. The students would write for approximately ten minutes, some more eagerly than others, with most on task.

What Lea noticed was this was an individual time that most students took very seriously. This journal time was a time to think and clarify for each of these students and they understood that. It was after the journal writing that the students knew they could share what they thought.

Once the writing time was finished, the class discussions would begin. Each was a stimulating and intense discourse that the students anxiously anticipated. Again it was noticed how easily these students shared their ideas and thoughts with others. Some even shared thoughts that were difficult for them to voice, for it appeared that somehow they felt it made them stronger to do so. Most of the discussions revolved around the specific issues the students were studying. One discussion dealt with the ozone and how long the students thought it would last. Another discussion was about drugs and trying to understand why people would want to use them. A third discussion focused on nuclear war and the possibility of it happening in these students' lifetimes. The fourth group brought up euthanasia and the controversy surrounding it. Another day the students talked about hate crimes -- what they were and why they occur. Still another time "trashing the earth" was discussed. A.I.D.S. was another topic discussed, bringing with it much controversy. Endangered animals, abortion, rainforests, and even the afterlife were touched upon briefly. These were serious issues that the students wished to discuss since they were emotionally involved and grappling with them internally. Holly, facilitating, did not espouse any personal prejudices about any of the subjects, but asked questions to help students clarify what they really believed. Observing the classroom discussions, Lea noted the correlation between the interactions here and the larger world, outside. It was a time for critical and reflective thinking, valuing, and ethical problem solving. It was also a time to expand thinking; to look outside the classroom and see the world of which these students are a part. They started to see beyond themselves and the middle school to envision their role and their impact on the larger world.

Class discussion also provided a window to look at the reasons why these problems exist and how they connect one to another. It later led students to examine and hypothize about the common thread that wound through the issues under study. The concepts of self-esteem and self-worth became the crux of these problems. The students stated that if they felt good about themselves and saw themselves as important, then they did not want to harm themselves, others, or the planet. When they thought they made a difference, they thought it should be a good difference, not a bad one.

When they talked about the negativity of these problems, however, they spoke in terms of others, not themselves.

One student voiced his concern about all these issues we examined through discussion. When we read Jerry's journal entry, we believed he was probably speaking for all students and their feelings, too. For in one way or another, each student had expressed how concerned they were about themselves, their progeny and their planet. Jerry wrote:

> I think A.I.D.S. is one of the biggest problems today. There are a lot of horrifying problems today. Crime, murder, pollution, other kinds of diseases, etc. But the problem is that it's getting worse. Way back when we did not have A.I.D.S., cancers, and that much pollution. But now it's not that bearable to live here. It's scary.

Literature Groups

We wanted the students reading and we wanted the content to be presented through an adolescent voice. We wanted the reality of death and dying to be seen through a variety of perspectives and we wanted the students to have a small peer group for discussion purposes. We also felt that these narratives could be the springboard for reading to learn and exploring the personal and societal concerns, issues and problems these students were studying.

The groups were given the freedom to decide how and when they would read their books. Three of the groups decided to read their books right away and use their group time to discuss and clarify

the happenings in the book. Other groups set timelines for completion of the reading. And one group set about the reading at their own leisure. Our primary purpose was for the students to enjoy the reading and complete it by the end of the unit.

The books served a number of purposes for the students, also. Some used the book as a tool for reflection, while others used them to explore their own feelings about death and what people may go through when others die.

Overall, we felt the narrative provided a beneficial bridge to the course of study. We did not want to make the reading a burden to them, because while we believe in reading to learn, we also believe in reading for pleasure. This aspect of the study did appear to bring these students pleasure. And this pleasure resulted in enhanced learning outside the contents of the narrative. It also contributed to the climate of intellectual curiosity that benefitted the whole group's learning context.

Individual Papers

Another element of this study was the students' individual papers. The only directive concerning the papers was that they not be research papers with an encyclopedia entry format. The students were working to become more reflective about what they studied, so response papers was the selected format.

The students were free to choose what they wanted to write about, but they still asked for some help. They eventually decided as a class that these papers would deal with a subject that the groups chose, but they would decide within the group exactly which subject they would choose. After making the choice, all the members of the group would write about the same subject. They realized their papers would not all sound the same because they all had different voices and would respond differently to the topic. One group chose euthanasia, another abortion, and another trash and recycling. Other groups chose endangered animals, drugs, and the last group chose crime in general, not hate crimes, which another group was working on. The class negotiated due dates for rough

drafts, revisions, and final copies. One thing that occurred was that when the rough drafts were due, the students encouraged each other to get them in on time. They were worried about this happening, because they wanted to show that they could follow through on their decisions about curriculum. We wondered if they were also trying to show themselves that they could fulfill their selected goals. The due date came, and all the rough drafts were completed. This was the first time this had happened in fifth period. The students were proud of themselves and it was, in some sense, their voice speaking in action.

The papers were due the fourth week of the study, so they found their focus divided between working on the book as a group, group projects, and working on their individual papers. The group decisions became harder as the students prioritized their own work according to their own needs. Many days Lea saw a variety of activities with Ms. Johnson serving as writing guide or project facilitator. But Ms. Johnson wasn't the only facilitator in the classroom anymore. Students were beginning to help each other, serving as resources as well as guides for better projects and clearer writing.

The individual papers were turned in just before spring break, which was the students' wish. Most of their commitments (and worries) had been dealt with and they found that making their own decisions had both problems and benefits. But, they would not really know, just as we would not know, where this road to integrative instruction with shared decision-making and authority had actually taken us. We would not know until we looked at where we had started, where we had broken down and where we had stopped. And we could only do this by again listening to student voices through their journals, individual papers, group presentations, as well as Lea's field notes and Holly's teaching journal.

Summary

This study clarified many of the questions we had about an integrated language arts curriculum and its assumption that

adolescents, if given the opportunity, will responsibly share power with the teacher. These rambunctious seventh graders eagerly accepted the invitation of negotiated decision-making with their teacher. They took their role as partner in learning seriously, and yielded their voice when appropriate. The result was an ebb and flow of control. Both teacher and students appeared comfortable with their respective roles and the requirements of this learning approach became attainable to each student. It was a thematic design that worked because the students could exercise and accentuate what they wanted to study in an environment conducive to their diverse capabilities. The writers could write, the speakers could present, the actors could perform, the artists could illustrate, and the readers could read. And the teacher could encourage the students to use those capabilities as well as their voices.

Other questions we had prior to this study concerned integrative curriculum itself. Was it feasible? Would the personal and social concerns of students intersect? And could students responsibly act upon and carry out to completion the decisions they made. Through observing their group interactions, participation in class discussions, and presentation of their projects, we both found that an integrative curriculum is a feasible way to approach sharing control in the language arts curriculum. The students actively engaged in content, languaging, social learning and academic interaction while exercising their values and voices in decision-making. And one of our most exciting discoveries was that the personal and social concerns of these adolescents actually intertwined. Because of this, they were motivated to learn and took the opportunity to design the learning activities and requirements. They took this study and themselves seriously which resulted in a greater sense of responsibility and person control. Although a few had problems carrying their ideas to completion, most responded and succeeded in bringing their decisions to actuality.

A third set of questions we asked before the study involved

the ability of these students and their teacher to design, establish, and execute an integrative language arts curriculum. We wondered how the definitions and assumptions of language arts instruction, and the resulting decisions, correlated with traditional curriculum. In this thematic unit on death and dying these students and their teacher succeeded in integrating the language arts curriculum where the students and teacher shared the decisions about what they wanted to study. Together they decided what to study, how to study it, and how to assess our progress. Together we all shared an exciting and purposeful learning experience that gave us all the opportunity to grow beyond where we had started.

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